

The Hale Books: Hell Hath No Fury

Alicia Sparks

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Chapter One

Logan. It wasn't even a name so much anymore as it was a throbbing, aching need. The word had come to embody everything she'd been forced to leave behind, everything that almost was but in the end... wasn't. Still, as she slunk through the alleyways and elbowed her way through crowds, every time she came across a man with short, dark hair and that certain cowboy build, her heart slammed against her chest, her breath lodged in her throat, and she swore for the final time that she was over him.

Logan Richards was a good boy, one of the last. He hadn't wanted her back then, no matter how the need for him seemed to control her every movement, causing her to think about him literally every waking moment. When she was younger, thoughts of being with him dominated her life, rendering her completely oblivious to the trouble she was courting just by letting her defenses down. Now, she didn't have the luxury of pining away for Logan. He was the past, and there was no way he would want her now, not if he knew what she was, what she'd done, and what she would continue to do every dark night. None of it mattered anyway. Logan was a memory, and she would do best to remember that.

She sheathed her sword and pulled her cloak around her body. Scarlett Hale did not need a man like Logan Richards. He would only slow her down. When fighting demons, it was best to be on guard, not to be wrapped up in ocean-blue eyes, an ass so tight his jeans practically groaned and a heart filled with the kind of goodness Scarlett had only fleetingly known in her life.

She wasn't born a Protector, but the occupation had chosen her. No regrets, she promised as she made her way quietly down St. Charles, determined not to attract attention. She garnered too much of that in the first place. What she needed tonight was

to be invisible, to slip into the darkness of New Orleans and disappear in a way that only she could. But the night wouldn't let her rest. Her sensors went off just ahead at a little out-of-the-way joint, the kind of place she normally wouldn't frequent.

Shit. The blood from the last monster hadn't even dried on her sword yet, and she was already being faced with a new danger. She pulled the tracking device from her back pocket, hoping it was a false alarm. Sure as shit, there was the green blip on her screen. When Jules designed these devices, he made sure they were able to sense the energy from thousands of different types of demons. All showed up in green.

The cool air licked at her ears as she hastened her steps, determined to get a hold on her raging feelings for Logan. She hadn't even seen the man in three years. All it had taken was one wrong word, and, boy, was he out of there. He'd left so fast, she swore the door must have cracked his skull on the way out. She was surprised he'd even taken the time to turn the knob before disappearing into the night, never to be seen again. Why she was thinking about him tonight of all nights, she had no idea. Maybe it was the way the moon peeked its face out from beneath the clouds, reminding her of nights past, which should have been long forgotten.

Good riddance, Logan. I've got a new life now that has nothing to do with you. The heels of her thick, black combat boots stomped the rhythm of her decree, but did little to ease the ache in her chest. *Good boys don't want girls like me.* If she had too many complications for Logan back then, Lord only knew what he'd think of her life now.

She pushed open the saloon style doors, her heart stopping for a second as she took a look around the cowboy bar. Shit. A whole room full of Logan-could-bes. Just what she needed tonight. And one of the posse was a fire-eating demon. She could smell him -- like rotten eggs. Something she was sure no one else in the room was privy to. Thanks to her monthly injections, her demon sensors were on overload.

Stepping fully into the bar, she walked as calmly as Doc Holliday might have. She'd studied Holliday in school and knew that he had been full of shit, more piss than anything else. But he carried himself in a way that made the other gunslingers shy away from finding out just how bad a shot he really was. Scarlett wasn't a bad shot. She was

dead-on, but the problem with demons was bullets did no good. Neither did prayers or exorcisms. No, the only way to kill an honest-to-God demon was to slice off his head with a silver sword.

Scarlett carried two.

As she walked up to the bar, the hairs on the back of her neck stood at attention. He was close, so close. All she would have to do would be to turn around, and she'd see him standing there, yellow eyes glaring at her. But she wanted to take the fight outside, didn't want to attract too much attention. People in New Orleans might be used to seeing some weird things during Mardi Gras, but they sure as shit weren't used to having demon blood spilled right in front of them.

"Howdy, ma'am." The bartender's drawl interrupted her plan of attack.

"Hi." She tried to keep her voice steady as her ears pricked. The demon was drawing near.

"Hey, cowboy, I need another Jack, 'k?" the waitress said as her perfume permeated the area and she stepped forward, leaning her ample cleavage over the bar. Scarlett almost choked on the smell of too many different kinds of flowers brought to an early death. Combined with the smell of cheap hairspray, it made for a noxious combination.

"Sure, Charlene. Let me see to the little lady here. Darlin', what will it be?" He turned his attention back to Scarlett.

"I'll have Jack on the rocks."

"A whiskey girl, eh?"

"Yeah." She turned, all the tension in her body collecting itself in her back. He was close, so close. But his scent evaded her, masked by the Southern Belle who stood next to her, popping her gum between her teeth, twirling her over-dyed hair on her too-long nails.

"Here you go, darlin'."

When the bartender slid the drink forward, an iciness slid up Scarlett's back. The same feeling gripped her every time she was in the wake of demons. She turned just as

the waitress flashed her yellow demon eyes. Instinctively, Scarlett gripped the hilt of her sword, still hidden by her black cloak.

"You wanna dance?" the demon practically hissed through her red lips.

"Now, Charlene. Calm down."

"She's got her eyes on my man." Charlene's gaze flashed toward a cowboy who sat in the corner, his hat pulled low over his face

Scarlett tore her gaze from Charlene and followed the woman's stare. The cowboy raised a glass of amber liquid to his lips. "I didn't come here for your man." Scarlett smiled a deadly grin, hoping the demon would back off, agree to take this outside. Man, she hated to kill demons in front of humans.

"What *did* you come for, sweetie? Cause you ain't takin' me out."

Cheap whiskey hit Scarlett's eyes, burning as it made contact, dulling her vision for half a second before she recovered. She'd had enough sense to use the eye drops Jules had given her, making her eyes immune to being blinded. But it didn't stop them from stinging like hell.

"It's on now," Scarlett warned, pulling the sword from her hiding place, drowning out the gasps that met her movement.

Cowboys circled her on all sides, determined to protect their fifty-cent waitress. And the woman moved so fast. Before Scarlett could get a clear line of attack, the demon shot to the other side of the room and tore into the cowboy's neck. His blood quickly coated his T-shirt. Scarlett knew she had to act fast if she planned to save him tonight.

Time seemed to slow down as she leapt across the room, slicing the demon's head off in one swift motion. The cowboys who had surrounded her stared in awe as the head rolled and acid spilled out instead of blood. Her only thought was to save the man who lay in a heap.

Scarlett pulled him to his feet, wrapped her arms around him and pulled him out into the alley. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out her communicator and typed in

the code to contact Jules. "I need help here. I'm behind some fucking saloon in the Quarter, and I've got a bite victim. Shit. Come on, Jules."

"I'm here, Scarlett. I'm coming to get you," the voice came through.

The cowboy's dead weight drooped against her shoulder. She thought she heard him mumble something incoherent. God, she had to save him. She hadn't lost a victim to a demon bite in over a year, and she sure as hell wasn't going to start tonight.

Panic overtook her other senses, making it difficult to fully comprehend the way his body felt pressed against hers. She would think about it later, after he was safe. Later, she would have time to think about the way the cowboy smelled -- like Stetson cologne and heaven. Much, much later she'd pretend if she lifted his hat, she'd see ocean blue eyes staring back at her. And then she'd pretend that her heart hadn't been ripped out by a "Good Boy" who couldn't understand she'd become.

Scarlett said a silent prayer to whoever might be listening tonight. Bite victims always teetered on the edge of death until they received Jules' serum. Tonight, there was even more of a sense of urgency in the air. She feared the cowboy might already have succumbed to the attack.

Finally Jules' landed his tiny hovercraft in the dark alley behind the saloon. As he stepped out into the darkness, the light from the moon caught his silver hair. He'd been battling demons long before Scarlett came onto the scene, and his years of waging war showed in his weathered blue eyes. Still strong as ever, he helped load the cowboy into the tiny craft. Scarlett settled in next to the stranger before closing the hatch. The military wouldn't have this kind of technology for fifty more years, but the Protectors had it, given to them by whatever power had deemed them above the law.

Scarlett had never been much for religion, but she sure as hell didn't ask when Jules told her God had chosen them. What the fuck *ever*. All she knew was that her life had been turned upside down and she sure as shit didn't like fixing some deity's little demon infestation problem.

"Will he be okay?"

"How soon after the bite did you call?"

“Like ten seconds.” Probably more like sixty, but it felt instantaneous.

“We can’t be certain. They are all so different. The demons, the bites, the victims. It all really depends. We’ll do what we can, Scarlett.” His voice was less than reassuring.

Man, she could use that whiskey now. “I shouldn’t have come with you,” she said finally. “You know there are more out there. I can’t take a night off. I’m sure he’ll be safe in your hands.”

“Let me get him back to quarters and then you can go save the day again.”

She knew he was talking, but for the life of her, she couldn’t make out the words. Her heart began racing in a way she wasn’t accustomed to, and then everything went blurry. If she could have held her head off the cowboy’s shoulder, she would have, but there was no use. Something was taking over, forcing her to lose control of her body. She slumped into the seat next to the sleeping cowboy.

And dreamed of Logan.

* * *

There was no damned way he was going to let this demon slip through his fingers. He’d been fighting these damned things for three years. Now, tonight, when one was so close her putrid breath was brushing across his neck, he’d lost it, and some woman had to come to his rescue.

He hadn’t even seen her, but he sure as hell felt her when she lifted him as if he weighed nothing and carried him out into the cool air. He hadn’t exactly been conscious, but he knew he’d been saved by a woman, one whose fragrance had already burned itself into his brain, one whose soft body collapsed against his as they made their way to what he knew must be safety.

He would be guided. He had been given a mission, and he sure as hell wasn’t going to let down those in charge. He might be dead, but there was a lot of fight left in him, and he wasn’t going out like this.

Damn it all to hell, she sure did smell good.

Chapter Two

“Look, I’m fine. I’ve got to get out of here.”

“How can you be fine when you have no blood, no heartbeat?”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

Scarlett heard the voices, which all sounded like they were far off. Whatever happened last night was still some kind of foggy haze she couldn’t wrap her mind around. She tried to sit up, only then realizing she was strapped to one of Jules’ fucking machines. Shit. This couldn’t be good. And that voice, the one that needed to be out of here so bad, sounded just like home.

Her eyes fluttered open as the voices stopped, but her vision was still a little blurry. “She’s waking up. Scarlett, can you hear me?” She heard a set of footsteps retreating as a chill crept up her back. There was no way that voice could belong to...

“Wait.” She sat up, barely straining the word out past her scratchy throat. The footsteps stopped as Jules placed his hand on her forehead. Her breath hung in her throat while the fluorescent lights came into focus.

There he stood, leaning against the doorframe as if the world didn’t depend on whether he looked at her or not. His head was tilted toward the floor. Then, as if they were in a movie, everything slowed down and he raised his head, a smile spreading across his ruggedly handsome face.

“Holy fucking shit.”

“Good to see you again, Scarlett. It’s been a while.” His smile deepened, glittering all the way up to his eyes.

If she’d been able to pull herself off the examining table and walk across the room to deck him, she would have. In fact, right now she’d give anything to wipe that

grin off his face. "Logan." The whole room felt like it was spinning, or maybe it was just her head. Either way, she swore she was going to fall again.

"Easy there." She hadn't even seen him move across the room, but his hands were on her, steadying her, sending some kind of vital energy into her body, forcing all thoughts from her head except for how good it felt to be pressed against his hard body, breathing in his air.

"Where the hell have you been? And what the hell happened to me?" The last she directed toward Jules who stood with his hand over his mouth, ogling the reunion.

Logan smiled as he answered the question. "Acid. Some of it got onto you and knocked you smooth out."

"And the other?"

"Well, that's a more complicated story."

"Complicated, my ass. I saved your life last night and... What?" Both he and Jules were staring at her as if they had a grand secret between the two of them.

"Nothing," Logan assured her in his usual brush-off manner.

"Don't give me that nothing shit. Tell me what's going on."

"He's dead, Scarlett." Jules squared his shoulders and shot an angry look toward Logan. "Dead. You didn't save him because he can't be killed."

One look into Logan's eyes and she knew Jules was speaking the truth. Holy fucking shit. Dead? But his arms felt so warm as they remained wrapped around her. Absolutely nothing made sense anymore.

Logan watched as the color drained from Scarlett's face. She didn't pass out, not that he expected her to after the way she'd handled that demon last night. But she did look up at him as if she didn't quite know what to say. Truth be told, he didn't know what to say either. And if he had an answer for any of the questions he saw in her face, he sure as hell didn't know what it was.

"That fucking figures." She pushed him away and then began ripping the monitors from her arms. "I have work to do."

Jules moved to her side, a stoic look of determination on his face. "You need to stay here. I need to check your vitals."

"I have work to do."

"I know, but we have things here that need attending." Jules shot a look of distrust toward Logan before turning back to Scarlett.

"He knows what he's talking about, Scarlett," Logan offered helpfully.

"Go to hell," she muttered, the words clearly directed at Logan. She slammed the door behind her as she stepped out into the hall.

"Ain't that some shit."

"That's our Scarlett. Now that she's gone, you want to tell me a little bit more about what it is you are?"

"Hell if I know. All I know is one of them bastards got me late one night and the next thing I know, I'm dying, but I'm not, you know? I woke up with a headache felt like a damned freight train. That was three years ago. I've been fighting them ever since."

"Hmm. Are you supported? I mean, do you work with anyone? There was blood on your shirt, is why I ask."

"I work alone. I've learned a lot in the past few years. One of those things is if you smell like fresh blood, they'll never know you're not alive."

Jules nodded, his voice filled with quiet intensity. "Scarlett's used to working alone, too. On the streets I mean. But she could use a partner."

Logan laughed. Never had he known Scarlett to ask for help with anything. He doubted she was going to start now. "She's a hell of a woman. Thinks she can hold her own."

"Yes, she does. With reason. She's been tested before. So tell me, who sent you?"

Logan swallowed hard. Who sent him? That was a question he'd like answered. There was a memory somewhere teetering on the edge of his mind, not quite bringing itself out into the open. He heard a mass of voices, none of them making sense. Then he

saw Scarlett as she'd been back when they were kids. The next thing he knew, he was a demon hunter. Plain and simple. "I can't answer your questions."

"Can't? Or won't?" Jules folded his arms, obviously wary of Logan.

"Can't. But if I could, I probably wouldn't. Now, were you serious about her needing a partner?"

Logan was alive. Damn him. And the raw need coursing through her felt like an open wound. He had no right to be alive, no right to be here, claiming he'd died and somehow wasn't dead. What the fuck was up with that, anyway? Scarlett slammed the door to her room, wishing there were enough locks on the compound to keep Logan Richards out of her head. No such luck. She'd have to be in fucking China right now to keep his ocean eyes from creeping into her domain, seeking out her very core and making her wish he would wrap his arms around her.

She would have fucked him in an instant. And it would have been just that, too. No lovey-dovey words, no connection of the souls. Just a hot fuck. Yeah, right. And all the demons would pack up and move back to their summer home. The truth was, Logan lit a fire somewhere deep down inside her with his slow drawl and his "I'm Southern, not stupid," attitude.

And now he was back and her heart couldn't take the aching, throbbing warning that made its way down her legs and into the floor beneath her. She could no sooner deny her love for Logan than she could deny her next breath. But, God, she didn't want to love him. She wasn't what he needed.

He needed some soft, country girl who didn't go around kicking demon ass. He needed some sweet little Southern thing who would bring him iced tea and ride on his tractor, not somebody who would soup the thing up and race it against bats from hell. No, no, no.

She sank down onto her bed and kicked off her boots, thankful that Jules had at least left her dressed when he hooked her up to all those confounded wires. Why the hell had he needed to monitor her anyway? And what the fuck was she doing being so

careless as to spill acid on herself? Even worse, why had she made such a scene and then shut herself up in her room? She should be out there on the streets fighting the bad guys. Logan had a tendency to do this to her, though. Make her unable to think straight.

Her pants had made it halfway down her thighs when the knock came at the door. She wasn't ready for any kind of confrontation. She didn't want to hear, "Sorry, baby, I would have called but I died." No, she wanted to hear, "Look, it'll never work between us, so get me out of your head."

If she did, it would be the first time.

Chapter Three

"Go away," Scarlett called after the third soft rap. But Logan wouldn't break down a door for her. He wasn't that kind of guy.

"I feel like I should explain."

"No need. I didn't ask for it." She tossed her pants into a pile of black clothes, noting that she should really do laundry sometime soon.

"Let me in, Scarlett." There was something sensual about the way he said it. There was no hint of command, but a slight coaxing, making her wish she could just throw open the door and let him in.

"I'm getting undressed."

Silence. But not the kind that indicated defeat. If she closed her eyes, she could see his hand reaching for the doorknob, a slight shake as his fingers moved. She'd always scared the hell out of him. Intimidated him was what her friends told her, but she knew there was more to it than intimidation. It all went back to the fact that Scarlett Hale was not Logan's type. End of story.

"I'm coming in."

"No, you're not."

There were no locks on her door at all, a stupid move, she knew, but this place was so heavily guarded, there was really no need. Getting past Jules' cyber lasers would be a difficult task. Getting past her threshold was not so tough.

The door opened slowly and he stood in the doorway for a half a second just as her hand went to her bra clasp. Well, hell. She bit her bottom lip, trying to think of what to do next. The smart thing would be to scare him off. If anyone knew how to do that, it sure as shit was her. Pinching the front closure between her fingers, she let it snap

before sliding the straps off her shoulders. The half-smile he wore didn't fade when she tossed the bra at his head. Without taking his eyes off her, he reached up and caught it.

Her heart stopped in her chest when he brought it to his nose. "You still smell like a spit-fire."

"And you still talk like a cowboy."

He laughed a slow, sexy laugh, the kind that only a Southern boy can do, and then he stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. He hadn't looked at her breasts yet. Small wonder, that. They were *not* Playboy Mansion material. But there was a gleam in his eyes, something very much alive and very intense as he took the three steps from the door to her bed.

"You thinkin' of throwin' those panties at me, too?"

Well, there was a challenge if ever she'd heard one. Her blood pounded in her ears, making it difficult to think when he leaned over her and put his hands on either side of her thighs. They were inches from her flesh, but she could feel the heat surging between them. His touch was electric, even if the man did claim to be dead. And it was enough to force her eyes up to meet his and make her wonder just what he planned to do next.

Scarlett sucked in her breath as she took in the angular lines of his face. He was still as ruggedly handsome as ever, with his square jaw which, for the first time ever, was covered with day-old stubble. A slight smile curved his lips, making his bottom one seem to hold the key to his sensuality. Silence hung between them like a thick velvet curtain.

"What do you want?" The words made their way between her clenched teeth. If she held her jaw any tighter, it would be sore in the morning.

"A truce between us?"

"There was never a battle. How could we call a truce?"

There had been a battle, one that raged in her soul for the past three years and still moved with a force that almost caused her to double over in pain. If only she could

reach up and touch his face, assure herself that he was another one of her damned hallucinations brought on by contact with the unholy.

But he wasn't a hallucination, even if he might be damned. Nope. He was a man, standing inches from her weakness, his flesh threatening at any moment to touch hers and cause eruptions of longing deep within her chest.

She wanted to kick him in the balls. Instead, she jutted out her chin and hoped he'd go away soon. If not, she couldn't be responsible for the hell she'd unleash on his body. Images of riding him until sunrise shot through her mind before she could stop them.

And then, damn him, he smiled again. But this time, he leaned in closer, his breath brushing against her chest as he moved. "You wanna reconsider that?"

"What?"

"That idea of a truce? 'Cause I sure as hell feel a battle raging right now and it don't have a damned thing to do with demons."

"Get away from me." When her hand made contact with his chest, she had every intention of pushing him away and darting past him as quickly as she could, naked or not. Even her pride wouldn't stop her from running this time. She'd get the hell out of here as fast as her legs would take her. But she froze, her hand resting against his hard chest, every thought of flight interrupted by the glimmer in his eyes.

"I don't think you want me to leave."

"I didn't invite you here. I want you to go." Her voice trembled a little, and she hoped he didn't notice.

"Do you now?" He smiled that damned, cocky cowboy smile.

"Yes." The word was forced from her throat as if it were nasty bile, rising, trying to sink back into her system. She wouldn't allow it. Not while she had him believing she needed him to go.

She practically jerked when his right hand rose to skim across her cheekbone. God, the last thing she needed was to melt into his touch the way she felt herself doing.

"I'll go. But not before I get what I came for." His eyes held hers spellbound as his slow drawl worked its way into her system, weakening her defenses. "I've been needing something for a damned long time. And I'm not leaving tonight without it."

She swallowed hard. "What would that be?"

"Salvation."

"Go to hell. If you wanted salvation, you wouldn't have turned me away so many years ago. You took my love and twisted it around into something awful."

"I didn't trust myself with you." His words were like a soft confession.

"No. You didn't trust me. You made it obvious that you wanted nothing to do with me even after you and I..."

"After we made love?" His eyes twinkled.

"After we *fucked*. I guess I just got a little too romantic whispering the one word to you, but you were my first. So, let's forget all about it now." She wished she could just walk away from him the way he had walked away from her so long ago. Unfortunately, she was trapped in her room with him.

"I can't forget about it. Or about you. I came back for you." There was something soft but serious in his eyes as he spoke the words, but she refused to let them soften her temper.

"I have a job to do, Logan, and I don't have time for you now."

"Jules said you need a partner."

"A partner?" Damn Jules. He had been trying to find someone to watch her back for over a year.

"Yes. A partner."

The words barely made it past his lips before they came down upon hers, soft and wet, firm, gentle, feeling like ten thousand rainbows in a naked sky. Whatever defenses she might have fooled herself into thinking she possessed slipped away as her hands tangled in his hair and pulled his mouth against hers.

His hard body collapsed against her, pressing her into the bed as his jeans grazed against her naked thighs. She heard a groan erupt as his hands traveled down the

length of her side and rested just along the edges of her panties. Her cunt squeezed and gasped, longing for release, longing to feel him slide into her and give her the same salvation he craved.

Her nipples betrayed her, announcing their longing to feel his hardened hands flick across them, preparing them for his tongue. Her breath shot out in a mad spurt, fanning across his face, belying the heated efforts of her arms to push him off her. Everything inside her quivered with forgiveness, desperate to melt into him, to allow him the siege of her body he so wanted and she so needed.

But Scarlett was not a forgiving woman. She reminded herself of this fact even as she felt the earth spin beneath them. He had walked out on her, had sworn he didn't love her, had taken her confession of love and squashed it as if it were an insignificant plea. And she still hated him for that and for the way he turned her body into molten lava on contact.

The pain that gripped her chest reminded her of two things. First, Logan was a good guy, and, second, good guys did not date demon slayers, even if the guy in question was technically, clinically dead.

"Get off of me." She finally pushed him away. She wouldn't let him do this to her.

He raised himself off her and looked down into her eyes, a half-smile still covering his face. "I'm here to help you. I won't touch you again unless you invite me in."

"When hell freezes over," she managed, trying to calm her erratic heartbeat.

"I thought you'd say that." He ran a finger along her bottom lip before pulling himself from the bed. "I'll see you around."

Logan let her have her moment of pride. Still, as he made his way back down the sterile hall and to the room Jules had provided him, he wished he had the guts to push her to her limit. When she pulled away from him, her eyes teeming with desire, her breath coming in short spurts, and demanded that he leave, he didn't fight, though God knew he wanted to.

But damn it all if he didn't feel like he had already walked away from her one too many times. He wished he could remember. Fuck, he wished he could remember. Their conversation earlier was nothing more than a way for him to try to uncover his past with her. He knew he had betrayed her, but he didn't realize until she said the words that they had made love. He had been her first, she'd said. If it had been in his power, he would have gone back to her, would have told her how much he wanted her, how much his desire for her scared the hell out of him. But her good sense had intervened. And damn if he could figure out what the hell to do with the woman who in the matter of just a couple of hours had gotten under his skin.

Kicking off his boots, he tossed himself onto the bed. It didn't feel nearly as inviting as Scarlett's had. Those voices in his head swirled around him as he remembered her face. The past was so strange to him. Sometimes, he had clear memories of what had happened. Other times, it was as if he were watching a movie and nothing made sense.

Tonight was one of those nights. He could see her laughing with him, running through a field. He watched as he reached out to pull her hair, causing her to fall against him. They laughed some more before she looked up at him, adoration filling her eyes. Then there was darkness as a chill went through his body. He would never know what had happened between them, but he knew that he had hurt her beyond repair. He swore in the darkness he'd right whatever wrongs he had committed.

Chapter Four

"Why the hell do you keep insisting I need a partner?" She'd waited until morning, giving herself time to recover from her almost mistake with Logan last night before confronting Jules. He was in his office, the oak bookshelves looming behind him, his head bent over a map of the city. He looked up when she entered the room, cursing with every step.

"Good morning, Scarlett. Nice to see you, too."

"Cut the crap, Jules." She sank into the leather chair usually reserved for lectures, mostly directed at her.

"There is no crap." He folded his hands over the map and looked at her like her junior high principal might have. "You need a partner."

"When hell freezes over."

"According to this map, it may be about to do that."

"What, is there a disturbance in the force, *sensei*?" She rolled her eyes.

"No. Not in the force, as you put it, but in the ground around us. This is a map of New Orleans. An energy map. There is an increase in activity."

"There's always an increase in activity this time of year."

"There's more to the story than that. I can't divulge all the details but..."

"But..." she prodded.

He let out a deep sigh, which usually meant he didn't plan to continue his line of thinking. "The Order wishes for you to work with someone. They want two of you in case..."

"In case I meet my death in the Quarter."

"Something like that."

"Not Logan. Anyone but Logan."

Again, he let out a sigh. He removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes before placing the glasses into his shirt pocket. Uh-oh. He was moving into father mode now. "Scarlett, how well do you know this Logan?"

"Well enough."

"Not so well, I would say. This man's DNA does not match that of your friend."

"And how do you have my friend's DNA?"

"You know my computer can access records anywhere in the world."

"A dangerous thing, if you ask me." She stood and nervously studied the book titles. They were all a blur as she tried to concentrate on what exactly Jules was trying to tell her, instead of thinking about Logan.

"Dangerous in the wrong hands. In our hands, it is safe."

"Yeah, you and the Order. Looking out for all of humanity." She grabbed a book and opened it. Poetry. Yuck. Lord Byron. Mad, bad, dangerous to know. She remembered him from high school.

"Scarlett, this man is not Logan."

The words were a blur again as she pretended to scan the table of contents. "And why should I care if he is?"

"Did you hear me, Scarlett? He's not Logan. He may look like your Logan, but he does not match the records on file."

"The records are wrong, then."

"No, they are not wrong."

She let the book fall from her fingers. Not Logan. What did that mean? She knew Logan, knew his crooked smile, his soft eyes. Knew him. And the man who had interrupted her in her room last night and then haunted her dreams was Logan. "Fine. So why do you want me to work with an imposter?" She raised her chin, determined to be strong.

"You need to keep him close. You need a partner, but you also need him close. Now that you know he isn't who he says he is, you can be more alert. You can watch your back more closely if he's with you."

"So you think he's here to kill me?"

"I don't know. All I know is that things have changed. This map is different from the one we ran two weeks ago. The computers are showing a disturbance beneath the ground."

"What else?"

"There is nothing else. Isn't that enough?"

"Usually, yes. But there's something in your eyes. I know there is something else you aren't telling me. And considering you told me about Logan, it must be big."

"There is nothing. Now, I am sure you have work to do."

"Yeah. Sure."

She left the room much more quietly than she'd entered. Her head was still reeling from the new information. He wasn't Logan. Then why did he know her? Why did she know him? She got that same tingly feeling deep inside that she always got with Logan, that same quivering in her stomach. Refusing to shed any tears over this, she did the only thing she could think to do. She went down to the workout room and pounded the hell out of her punching bag.

* * *

"I told you I don't need your help." The rain poured overhead, sticking Scarlett's hair to her face and back in a tangled mass. Logan seemed unaffected by it as his cowboy hat caught the brunt of it. Still, he insisted upon following her into the street as the wind captured more of the storm, blowing it against them.

"I'm coming with you." She was determined to lose him in the New Orleans maze, and he was determined to stay hot on her heels. He could do whatever the hell he wanted, she didn't care. Still, she couldn't help warming slightly at the thought of him wanting to be with her as she went into the night.

"Suit yourself." She flung the words over her shoulder and didn't dare look back. If she did, she would see the sly crooked smile that had every ability to turn her stomach to jelly. Nothing quite like a red hot cowboy. She mentally shook herself, erasing the image of Logan's shirtless body from her mind.

Her fingers closed around her sword, which hid just beneath her long trench coat. Demons were near. She could feel them in the way a chill crept up her back, the way her skin prickled at the slightest movement of her body. She stopped just short of turning the corner and pulled the sword from its hiding place in one swift motion. Turning, she let her instincts guide her, as the sword rose and made contact with the threatening demon.

"What the hell are you doing?" Logan's neck was mere centimeters from being sliced in half.

Her heart leapt in her chest. Shit. She had to concentrate. The sword's blade rested near the hollow of his throat while the hand gripping it shook uncontrollably. "What the hell are you doing, Logan? Why won't you leave me alone?"

"I'm your partner now."

"No, you're not. You're a tagalong. Now, I'll try this again. What the hell are you doing here?"

"Here in the street or..."

"Here. In New Orleans. Why are you *here*?" She pressed the sword into his throat with enough pressure to make him nervous but not cut into his flesh.

"I don't know. If you'll drop the sword we can..."

"Finish what we started last night? Pick up where we left off? I don't fuck dead guys." She moved slowly, replacing her sword at her hip.

"So I'm safe from your lust?"

"Go to hell." She turned on her heels, determined to put as much distance between them as she could.

"Don't walk away from me." He grabbed her shoulders and spun her around, pulling her against him faster than she could react. Before she knew it, her arms were pinned to her sides and she was pressed against his cock.

The rain poured, refusing to let up the assault, just as his unyielding eyes drove into her relentlessly.

"I feel something," she whispered, barely able to find her voice.

"I feel something, too." There was a softness in his eyes that she didn't like one bit. His hard cock pressed against her stomach as he held her firmly against him. She knew he was going to kiss her, could just about feel it in her toes. Her tongue darted out as her body again played traitor, falling right into his arms.

"Let go of me." If he didn't, she would lose whatever sense she had left, and around him, even if he was an imposter, that was pretty damned close to nothing.

"You let go of me."

Her eyes followed his as she realized she'd taken hold of his forearms in a death grip. Her face flushed, she released him, wrapping her arms around herself. "What do you want from me? What are you doing here?"

"I'm protecting you. Or at least helping you. I feel like I owe you that much."

She didn't buy it for a second. There was a lot more to his appearance than that, and she had a sudden urge to get to the bottom of it all. "You don't owe me anything." Except an explanation or two.

"Oh, really? Then you don't want to know what I was doing three years ago?"

Lies. Whatever he could tell her would be nothing but lies. He was not Logan. "No, I don't want to know any of it."

"You're a damned liar."

"No, I'm not. I have a job to do, so if you'll excuse me, there are demons to slay."

"More than you know." He muttered the words, which didn't require a response. Still, they shook her as she once more moved down the dimly lit street.

St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 was a regular demon haunt mostly due to its popularity with the tourists. There was always plenty of fresh blood on hand. Tonight, she would go in and clean house, making the demons who frequented the area wish they had chosen another hiding spot. "They're here," she whispered, raising a hand to her partner, causing him to stop behind her. "Don't move."

He obeyed, standing a step or two in the shadows as she moved out into the moonlight. The big old tombs at St. Louis pre-dated the Civil War. They were all above ground due to the Mississippi River's habit of flowing out of her banks. Tonight, each

hovering monument seemed to be covering up some kind of creepy crawly as the hairs on the back of her neck stood at attention.

They were here, she could feel them, but not one showed its ugly face yet. They were watching and waiting, as if they were stalking her, playing cat and mouse. Tonight she was in no mood for games. She wanted to kill, to watch the green slime ooze from their bodies as she struck them down one after the other. She lived for the violence of her chosen field. Slaying was what drove her, fed her need for action, fed her bloodlust.

A pair of arms wrapped around her and pull her into the shadows. Her instincts served her wrong tonight, and the last thing she felt was the piercing sting of something biting into her skin before she was tossed aside.

Everything went fuzzy then. Her head spun. Lights flashed before her eyes and she felt as if she were underwater. Her legs refused to work when she tried to stand, and, worse, she couldn't reach her sword.

* * *

Jules looked into the microscope once more, examining the blood he had taken from Logan last night. The man was going to be a problem, especially since Scarlett seemed to care so much for him. Just seeing the two of them together made Jules realize how delicate their mission was. At any moment the balance between good and evil could sway one way or the other. All it would take was a tiny seed planted in well-worn soil. The entire project could be destroyed.

The Order wouldn't like this one bit. The experiment had been more successful than anyone had ever imagined. Logan was alive. They had known when they brought him back from the dead he would be her one weakness, but those in charge knew this was the way to test her, to see if their efforts to program her had been successful or not. Until now, she had the appearance of a killing machine who slew demons mercilessly. But then Logan came along. It had only been three days and already she was wavering.

When Jules first brought her here, she'd accepted the mission as truth from a God she didn't believe in. But she'd been alone then, heartbroken. Now, her heart,

hardened as it might be, was open to infection. Jules had told the Order that this was a bad idea. She was not strong enough to move to the next phase. *A war is brewing*, they told him. *We must move now*. So he'd been the one to bring Logan back, to reanimate him, knowing he would be their biggest challenge. Logan had proven himself to be just that when he escaped from the compound in San Antonio just days after his reanimation.

Jules needed to call the Order. Someone there would know what to do with this mission -- he sure as hell didn't know. His first instinct was to abort, to kill Logan and be done with it. But he knew Scarlett would kill him first if she thought Logan was in danger. He knew deep down she did not for a second believe his lie about Logan being an imposter. Even now they grew closer as they hunted together.

In all his years of training slayers, he had never come upon one like Scarlett, with her vulnerabilities and strengths. And he had never come upon an adversary like Logan. With one kiss, the cowboy could destroy everything they had all worked so hard for. The only way to handle him was to get rid of him, and that had to happen at Scarlett's hand.

* * *

Paralyzed, Logan watched in horror as a creature appeared from nowhere to grab Scarlett and place a syringe to her neck. Before he could move, it injected her and disappeared as she fell to a heap on the ground. As his body caught up to his mind, he rushed to her side.

As far as he could tell, the demons gathered in the cemetery were gone. The hair on his neck wasn't standing at attention as it had been before, but now his heart threatened to beat out of his chest as he reached down to check her pulse. It was faint, but there.

"Come on, Scarlett. Don't you dare die on me now," he whispered against her neck, pulling her into his arms. The syringe lay next to her on the ground. Carefully, he took it and wrapped it in a bandana.

His every instinct told him the only person who could save her was Jules, but damn, he didn't trust that man. There was something about the way his silvery eyes stared into Logan, as if he were some kind of damned lab experiment.

"Hang on, honey. I'm gonna take care of you," he whispered again.

He wasn't without resources. He had survived a long time in the city on his own without causing suspicion, and he knew exactly where he could take her. There was no way he was going to hand her over to Jules until he could figure out a thing or two about that old man.

Hailing a cab, he shoved the man a hundred dollar bill and told him to be quiet and drive. Within an hour, they were out of the city and well on their way to a safe haven, one where Jules couldn't get to her.

When the cab stopped in front of the old, abandoned house, the driver shot him a wary look. He handed the man another hundred and the guy drove off. Just like that. *Gotta love the power of the almighty dollar.*

Pushing the door open with one hand, he shifted Scarlett in his arms and went inside. He hadn't been gone long, and everything was exactly as he'd left it. No one would ever find them out here. Placing her on the sofa he had covered with an old blanket weeks before, he turned to the fireplace and began stacking the kindling. Within seconds, the fire blazed.

He rubbed his hands briskly before the fire, not that he felt cold, but he didn't want them to be cold when he touched her. Taking an extra blanket, he placed it in front of the fire and began removing his wet clothing. As soon as he was stripped down to his boxers, he moved to her side.

God, she took his breath away. Why he had resisted her for so long, he had no idea. And now, they were in one hell of a situation. He was dead, and she might not be far behind him. And he was too scared to take her back to the place she called home. The little bit of snooping he'd done since he'd been there was enough to tell him something was off-kilter. It was almost as if he had been there before, though he knew he hadn't. There was something about the starchy, germ-free white walls and echoing

corridors that reminded him of an asylum. He had never been insane to his knowledge, but he was likely going that way now.

"I'm not gonna hurt you," he whispered as he slowly began removing her shirt. He pulled her into his arms to pull the shirt off over her head, then he gently laid her back down to work on her pants. Trying not to focus on her strong thighs as he slid the pants down, he covered her with the dry blanket. When he pulled her boots off and tossed them to the side, he pulled her into his lap and sat there, his mind racing, wondering what to do about the drug that had been injected into her body.

"Logan?"

"Yeah, it's me." He smiled, hoping this was a good sign.

"Go to hell," she mumbled.

It was all he could do not to laugh out loud. If ever there was a sign that she was going to be okay, this was it. "I'll meet you there, darlin'."

Chapter Five

Jules turned on the computer and stared at the blank screen. His experiment had failed. That was the problem, though. There had been too many experiments. Too much work just to see what would happen next. Now they knew. Things had gotten out of control. Now both Logan and Scarlett were missing, and he was being held accountable.

The syringe containing the formula had been stolen last evening, just as he'd planned. But now, there were so many holes in his study, so many questions left unanswered. He watched Scarlett's tracking device as it flashed on and off on the main screen. She was alive, and well out of town. Logan, damn him, had taken her somewhere for safekeeping. That meant he was onto Jules and probably the Order.

"Do you have an answer for us yet?" The tracking screen turned off as the call came in. Micahel, the spokesman for the Order, appeared, his dark hair barely hiding the small set of horns growing from his head.

"Not yet."

"Where is she?"

"An abandoned plantation down on Ponchartrain. He's with her."

"And so she lives?"

"Yes." He averted his eyes. Staring into Micahel's deep green eyes always induced a trance of truthfulness, something he wished to avoid at the moment.

"Then it is done."

"No, it is not done. There are so many things we don't know, so much they don't know, but this whole affair is starting to unravel and..." He looked up.

"They will never figure it out. She doesn't even believe we exist. Why should she question our motives when she thinks that all she's doing is fighting demons?"

"She *will* figure it out."

"She is human. She is weak."

"She has been injected with your..."

"It will not matter to her. She does not believe in God or heaven or hell. She certainly does not believe in me. For our little Scarlett, the only truth in the world is blood. Killing is what she lives for. How long ago do you think she stopped fighting demons for the side of good and crossed over to killing for blood? It is only a matter of time. Now, that process will only speed up. There is no need to find her. She will find you."

"You don't know her like I do."

"No, but I'm in her blood now. When she comes back, it will be with a vengeance. She will want you dead. If I were you, I'd watch my neck."

The screen went black, but Micahel's words echoed in the room. Scarlett would try to kill him, of that he was certain. Which meant his backup plan was now shot all to hell. She wouldn't go after Logan once she realized the deception. Instead, she would come for him.

* * *

"Goddamn, where are we?" Scarlett sat up, feeling groggy from whatever the hell had happened to her last night. The room slowly came into view, what she could see of it. Either her eyes weren't functioning or she'd finally managed to wake up in hell.

"My place."

Logan. No, not Logan. That other guy, that imposter. "What the hell are we doing here?"

"Sit up and I'll tell you."

She tried, but it wasn't until a strong pair of arms steadied her shoulders that she could actually move enough to sit. "I'm naked."

"You have a blanket on. I promise, I was honorable."

"Like hell you were."

"I'm glad to see you're feeling better."

"Go to hell."

"Already been, thanks. Have a nice condo there." This gained him a glaring stare from her.

"Shit. What the hell hit me last night?"

"You know, for such a pretty little Southern thing, you cuss like the devil."

"You bet your ass. Now, what happened?"

"Demons." He shrugged. "You want some water?"

"I need a bathroom." She forced her legs off the edge of the sofa and tried to stand. "Shit," she grumbled.

"Take it easy." He stood and placed a hand under her arm to help her. "Come on, I'll guide you. I promise I won't look."

"How could you resist? I must look like a Goddamned ray of sunshine."

"As usual. Now come on." To his surprise, she leaned against him without arguing as he led her to the bathroom. "Can you make it?"

"Yeah. Wait for me."

"Sure."

He leaned against the door and waited, wondering how the hell he was going to tell her what he had discovered last night. He might be dead, but he wasn't an idiot. This place may be somewhere in the remote swamps, but he had technology and knew how to use it. He hadn't had much when he regained consciousness a few years ago, but what he had, as it turned out, was the key to this whole damned mystery.

The door opened and she stumbled forward. "You okay?"

"Peachy fucking keen."

"That's my girl."

He led her back to the sofa and then brought her a glass of water.

"Thanks," she managed.

"I've got food, too, if you want."

"You got lights?"

"Yeah. Generator. But it's still electricity."

She smiled. "Just like home."

"So, you hungry?"

"No. Why are you being nice to me?"

"Because this is going to be one hell of a day for you." He let out a long, deep breath.

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. Tell me when you're ready."

"Where are my clothes?"

"By the fire. I'll let you get dressed if you think you can manage. Then we can talk."

"I'll manage, but I'm not interested in talking."

"I think you'll want to hear this."

* * *

It took a full ten minutes, but she finally managed to get dressed. He still hadn't told her what had happened to her last night, but she had a feeling it wasn't good. Whatever it had been had taken her away from the safety of the compound, and that couldn't possibly be good.

"I'm ready." She took slow steps into the kitchen.

"You look beautiful," he said as he looked up from his coffee.

"Bite me."

"Look out. I might."

"Feels like something did. What the hell got me last night anyway?" She sank down into one of the kitchen chairs, opposite where he sat.

"This." He pushed forward the syringe.

"Jules got me? What the fuck?" She knew these syringes. Hell, she'd been pumped full of all kinds of shit in the past few years from needles that looked just like these. They were special order, designed to handle the fucking toxic shit they had put into her blood so often.

"Jules was behind the attack. But there's more. A hell of a lot more. You want to know?"

"I'll tell you what I want to know, Logan. I want to know who the fuck you are and why I'm here."

"Scarlett, look me in the eyes and ask me that."

She couldn't. She knew if she looked into those ocean eyes she'd see the boy who had taken her heart years ago. Swallowing hard, she avoided his eyes. Hell, she'd never been scared of a Goddamned thing... except for him. Licking her lips, she slowly looked up at him. "Who are you?" The question didn't have the same impact this time.

"I'm your guardian angel, and I'm here to get you away from this madness."

"You're full of shit."

"No, Scarlett, I'm not. Please, you have to listen to me."

She looked down to see his hands cover hers. His skin felt so warm, as if he were really alive. But he wasn't. Someone or something had brought him back from death, and there was no explanation for it. There was no explanation for who he was or why he looked like her Logan or why all she wanted to do was fall into his arms and have him be *her* protector.

"So far, you've done a bang-up job of watching my ass." She pulled her hands away from his and placed them in her lap.

He smiled. "I'll have you know, I've been watching your ass ever since it sashayed into that bar a few nights ago."

"Has it only been that long?"

"Be serious. We need to talk. Let me show you something." He turned his hand over, palm up, and showed her the scar that ran from his thumb to his pinky. "You want to know what that's from?"

"Your rodeo days?"

"No. There was something under my skin when I woke up. I cut it out."

Beneath the table, her fingers ran along the palm of her left hand. She could still feel the implant there, and she knew exactly what he was talking about. "What do you

mean?" She didn't look up at him, knowing if she did, she wouldn't be able to lie to him.

"I mean, they put something there. It was a device of some kind. For three damned years, I've been trying to break the code on that thing. Now, I think I'm close."

"And?"

"And I think you know the rest."

"No, I don't."

"You've got one, too, don't you?"

"It doesn't matter." She pushed away from the table and stood on wobbly legs before making her way to the window. The birds were singing and it looked like a happy fucking day in the outside world. So why was there so much chaos inside her little world?

"It's part of the answer, Scarlett. And it does matter."

Before she could protest, he stood behind her, his hands on her shoulders, squeezing gently with a familiarity that drove her mad.

"What do you want from me?"

"More than you want to give, I promise. But for now, I need some answers."

"What do you think they put into me last night? Why do you think a demon did it?" She turned in his arms, tears glittering in her eyes. She knew he didn't have the answers, but right now, he looked like exactly what she needed.

"I don't know."

"I'd like a truce." She raised her chin as she spoke.

"Me too, Scarlett. Me too. How about we start now?"

Her hands went up immediately as he closed in on her, his lips crashing against hers. She didn't want him to kiss her, but she couldn't manage to unmold her body from his as the fire swept through her, threatening to knock her off balance as he leaned into her. Damn, if he didn't kiss like the devil. Could be for all she knew. Still, she couldn't help winding her hands through his short hair and pulling him in closer for a taste. One taste wouldn't hurt, would it?

But something wasn't right with Logan. He smiled too much for a dead guy, as if he wasn't pissed off at the world that his life had been ripped from him and replaced with this... whatever it was. But the fire he lit inside her was undeniable. She was afraid to get too close to him, afraid she would find herself once more on the brink of doing anything to hold him. Her pride wouldn't allow it, but her body cried out for the chance to hold press herself against him, to see if she could love him.

She was practically panting by the time he tore his lips from hers. "If I don't stop now..." He didn't finish the thought. He didn't have to.

"Then don't stop..." She didn't even recognize her own voice as the words escaped her lips. She was no better off now than she had been three years ago. She would still do anything for Logan, risk anything to be with him. And she knew her soul would be damned for it.

Chapter Six

There were too many questions racing through her mind, but none of them seemed important enough to distract her from the task at hand. She planned to love Logan as if her very life depended on it. This could be the last time she held him, the last time the fire of desire was lit between her thighs. God knew it hadn't been lit since he disappeared. And now, he was pulling her toward the living room, toward the sofa they had shared last night.

"Do you know what I want to do to you?" His rough voice dragged across her skin. He pulled her shirt over her head and tossed it across the room. Then his hands were on her zipper, pulling it down as quickly as he could manage.

"Don't talk." All she wanted to do was feel as her clothes were deposited along with his.

"I've wanted you since I first set eyes on you."

"You never wanted me," she managed as his hands reached for her breasts.

"I've always wanted you. I would move heaven and earth to be with you."

"No, you wouldn't." He never had before, and she'd given him more than one chance.

"You have no faith in me."

"I don't have faith in anything."

"Well, we'll see about that."

When his lips captured hers, she thought she'd die from the sensation. Logan didn't feel like a man who had been dead for three years. His body was warm, solid, full of muscle and lusty goodness. It didn't matter anymore that he had been dead. All that mattered to Scarlett was that he was here now, his lips on hers, stealing the breath from her lungs as his tongue worked its magic on her mouth.

She wrapped her arms around him and pulled him close to her, hoping she could get close enough to erase the pain she'd felt when he left so long ago. His scent invaded her system. He smelled like musk and sweat and hard, firm man. His erection pressed against her stomach, reminding her of things she'd never forgotten though she'd tried desperately.

So much had happened, but when his hands went into her hair and he looked into her eyes, she was lost. The past was lost. All that mattered right now was him loving her. Ignoring the tug at her heart, the threat that she and Logan could be more than lovers, she arched her back against him, begging him to take her, to show her how good things could be for them.

"How do you want it to be between us, Scarlett? Do you want me to look deep inside your mind and find the one thing you want, the one thing no one else has ever been able to give you?" His eyes narrowed, and he seemed to be looking deep inside her soul. She didn't want to open to him, but the intrusive stare was something she couldn't fight.

There had only been one person she would allow to love her the way she wanted, only one person she would abandon her tough girl demeanor for. And right now, it seemed as if he were here with her, offering her exactly what she'd always wanted.

"You don't know what I want," she challenged.

"Yes, I do. You want to lose control, to give up control to someone else. You want someone who can hold his own with you, someone who can give as good as he gets."

Yes, she wanted that and so much more. "You've been gone for so long."

"That has nothing to do with it. I still know where you live and breathe. I know how you want to be loved. I just never had the balls to do it before. But now, I'm going to make your fantasies come true. But you have to trust me."

Famous last words. Trust me. How many times in the past had she trusted him only to get her heart irreparably broken? She bit her bottom lip, hoping the answer would come to her. Could she trust him?

"Fine. Do it, then. If you think you know what it takes to make me quiver, why don't you do it?"

"Not yet," his raspy voice bit into her neck. "Not yet, love. I need to taste you first."

His tongue trailed down her neck and made its way to her breasts. It only stayed there for a few seconds, just long enough to tease her nipples and make her moan in ecstasy. Then he moved further down, across her stomach and finally settling at the thatch of hair between her thighs. At first, he just looked at her, as if he had never seen a woman before. His fingers slowly opened her lips and then allowed them to close. His thumb rubbed lightly against her clit then moved to trace a line on her inner thigh.

God, if he didn't hurry up, she was going to go mad! Rather than touching or tasting, he seemed to be studying, experimenting. His fingers only grazed against her skin, not giving her what she needed. Her body broke out in uncontrollable shivers as his breath blew against her clit, forcing it to swell, forcing her insides to quiver and throb.

"Logan, please." Her voice was just above a moaning whisper.

"I want to take it slow."

"I don't want slow. I want now." To echo her point, she raked her nails across his back.

"Damn, girl. Slow down or I'll come on the sofa instead of inside your sweet box. Now, do you want me?"

Surely he was joking. "Yes, I want you!"

"Then you're going to have to wait. Let me get to know your body. Let me take it slow."

"But that wasn't my fantasy." She was on the verge of something. Tears? No. That didn't seem right. But there was an aching need inside her chest that couldn't be explained.

"I didn't say it was. You'll get what you want, but I'm going to get what I want, too."

"I can't stand it."

"You're gonna have to stand it because that's what you're going to get."

Like hell.

His fingers closed around her wrists when she tried to rush him. "Let me go." Panic overtook her. This was more than sex or a fantasy. This was her life. She'd never handed over control to anyone. In her line of work it would be foolish. Maybe this wasn't what she wanted after all.

"No." He smiled one of those crooked cowboy smiles that always melted her heart. "I've waited a long damn time for this, and I plan on doing it my way, Scarlett. You're not a slayer. You're a woman. And I'm going to show you how a woman should be treated. I'm going to make your darkest fantasy come true. Deep inside that head of yours is a woman who's soft, but this outer shell is so hard, so tough. I've got to break through it. Do you see?" His words sent a shiver through her body.

"Logan, please."

"Please what?"

"Let go of my wrists." She was on the verge of tears now.

"Why should I?" he teased.

"Because I can't control... I don't know. There's something inside me that can't..." She couldn't explain. A slow rage built inside her as her heart hammered in her chest. "I'm afraid," she managed.

"Afraid of what?"

"Goddamn it, let me go!" She pushed against him, knocking him to the floor.

"Shit."

"Oh, God, are you okay? I don't know what happened."

"I do. I pissed you off."

"There was something else. It was... I don't know what it was." It was rage. The blood thirst. In that second, she could have killed him. Shit, she had to get a handle on things.

He sat up. "Maybe we shouldn't do this, then."

"I didn't mean to..."

"I know. I should have listened. Sorry. I've never tangled with a slayer before."

"Can we try again?"

He smiled. "Where was I?"

She lay back and opened her legs. Taking his hand, she guided him to her pussy. "You were here."

"Oh, yeah. Here." He placed gentle pressure on her vulva and smiled. "Your lips are swollen," he said while his fingers grazed against her labia. "Do you like to be touched, Scarlett?"

"Yes."

"I bet you like to be touched here." He flicked her clit with his thumb. The sensation went all the way to her toes.

"Yes." God, she was moaning again, her struggle with sanity lost somewhere in his touch.

"Your pussy is so wet. It smells so sweet. Do you know how sweet you smell?"

"No." She tossed her head from side to side as his warm breath teased at her opening.

"Do you know how long I have wanted to taste you? You were all I could think about for the past three years. I wanted to feel your sweet body melt against me. I wanted to take your cunt in my hand, like this." His hand closed over her pussy, completely covering it. He gave a slight squeeze before he released her. Her breath hung somewhere in her throat. In fact, she couldn't remember the last time she'd inhaled.

"Logan."

"Have you had other lovers, Scarlett? Did they tease you like this? Or did they take you hard and rough, the way you want it?"

"Yes."

"That's not an answer. Tell me how they did it."

"Hard and rough. Like you said." Her voice wasn't her own. It was strained by her passion, by her desire for him.

"I bet they pounded into you, made you come and then left. Am I right? Did they stick their dicks into you, ride you hard and then leave you full of come?"

His crudeness was as much a turn on as lying there, open for him. He was being rough without being physically rough. Who knew it was even possible?

"Answer me." His voice was harsh as it brushed against her.

"Yes. They fucked me and then left." Tears threatened to spill out at the admission. She'd never been able to hold onto a man, not that she'd wanted anyone other than the man who controlled her at the moment.

"This is going to be different, Scarlett."

His tongue darted out and ran across her clit as she arched her pussy upward, hoping it would come into contact with his whisker-covered chin. Anything to ease the ache, the pain that had built up deep within her core and threatened to overtake her sanity. When she didn't find the release she sought, she collapsed against the sofa, letting out a harsh sigh.

"I'm different from them, Scarlett. I want your body, but I can wait. I don't have to dive in, cock first. I can hold off and make you come without ever touching you. Do you want me to do that? Do you want me to make you come without touching your pussy?"

"You can't," she challenged, secretly wanting him to do it and knowing if any man alive or dead could, it was Logan.

"I know all the ways to torture your sweet body and have you so wet for me I won't even know how tight you are."

"Please love me."

"I will. I do. But not yet. First, I want to touch you."

"You've been touching me."

"I want to touch you here." He placed his hand over her heart as he spoke, causing a lump to form in her throat.

"You're such a sap."

"No, I'm not. I want you to do something for me."

Anything. "What do you want?"

"I want you to breathe. I want you to breathe in and out while I touch you. Can you do that for me?"

She nodded, not sure what the hell breathing had to do with sex.

"I can see inside you if you let me."

"You can what?"

"I can see inside you. I can see what they did to you."

His hands covered her heart, and she lay there in silence, afraid to move, afraid to breathe. What was he doing to her? One minute he had her all hot and bothered and the next he was trying to see inside her soul.

"Shit." The word came out between clenched teeth, causing her to open her eyes wide.

"What is it?" she asked.

"They're using me to get to you."

"Who is?"

"The Order. The ones who put that damned thing into your hand. The ones who injected you with poison. Shit."

He moved away from her and sat at the end of the sofa.

"How do you know?"

"I've figured out their little code. It's all in the chip in your hand, just like it was in the one in mine. They want you to kill me."

"Can we just fuck and forget about all that stuff?" She sat up, wishing life were that simple.

He shot her a crooked smile before pulling her into his arms. "With us, it's always more complicated than just fucking, isn't it?"

"Logan?"

"Yeah?"

"Please fuck me."

"I'll fuck you all right. I'm going to make you scream my name so loud the demons in the French Quarter will hear it. I'm going to make you come until morning."

"You promise?"

He placed a quick kiss on the top of her head. Not exactly what she had in mind.

"Yes. But first, I need your hand."

"Why?" She placed her hand in his.

"Because you've got one of these fucking things in you, too, and I want to get it out."

"I'll let you get it out later, cowboy. Right now, I want you to come here."

She pulled his mouth down to hers and wrapped her arms around him, turning with the motion, pressing her breasts against his chest. They had been naked for so long and it felt so right to be here with him like this. All this talk of demons and conspiracies was too much to think about. The only thing she needed was the man whose tongue was slipping in and out of her mouth, promising heaven with each motion.

"I want you."

"I want you, too, sweetheart. But not yet." His breath brushed against her neck as he placed tiny kisses on her ear.

She was going to die if he didn't take her soon. So many emotions swirled in her head, but overshadowing all others was the desire to be with him. And God help her, she didn't want him for just a night. She wanted to pick up where they had left off so long ago and see if they could have a future together.

"Logan." Again, tears welled up in her eyes. "Please love me."

There must have been something different in her voice this time because he stopped moving completely. Her swollen clit would have moaned had it been able to

when he shifted positions, placing his cock at her opening. Her cunt squeezed in anticipation.

“I do love you, Scarlett. I have always loved you.”

Slowly, he entered her body. She reveled in the feel of velvet on silk as his cock slipped into her cunt, which greedily accepted him.

Love. He had said it, but did he mean it? Did she? She knew she loved him, knew that she'd loved him longer and harder than she'd ever loved anyone. She couldn't answer yet, though. The words were caught somewhere in her throat.

His mouth was hot when it joined with hers. Nothing would ever be the same for her now that Logan had become part of her body. Memories of this moment would be burned on her brain forever.

He began rocking slowly, not taking his cock from her body, but pushing it in even further. She'd never had a G-spot orgasm before, but she felt close at this moment. Her hands were too busy exploring the curves and lines of Logan's chest to worry about rubbing her clit. She closed her eyes and breathed him in, hoping this would be enough for her. They might not have another moment like this due to the dangers of her chosen field.

“Sweetheart, you feel so good.”

“Don't talk.”

He laughed as he began thrusting into her, his gentle side having been abandoned for the fierce loving she wanted. Her legs strained against him, but there was no escaping. She was open for him, exposed to him, and loving every second of it. His head dipped down and he bit her bottom lip seconds before the pressure inside her body built to an explosive level.

Her nails bit into his skin as she arched her back and bucked against him, meeting his long, intentional strokes. She felt his back stiffen as his breath hung in his throat. Hot seed spilled into her body, pushing her over the edge, forcing her to face the pleasure only he could bring.

The unspoken words hung in the air between them. There was still so much evil out there, and so many unanswered questions. But there was no way she could go back home now, and there was not another home that would come close to this one.

Chapter Seven

"This is what I wanted to show you."

They sat in his basement, legs touching, looking at the information on his laptop. It was all a jumble of codes and numbers, and Scarlett didn't understand any of it. She wrapped the towel around her left hand, pulling it tightly to stop the bleeding where she'd pulled the device from beneath her skin, just as Logan had once done with his.

Pulling the blanket around her naked body, she leaned against his shoulder, still worn out from their lovemaking. "It's all numbers."

"Right now. But watch this." He pressed a button, and the entire thing transformed before her eyes.

"Holy fuck. What the hell is that?"

"It's a map. I know Jules has one. I've seen it. This is beneath the city. This is what's going on."

"It's just a bunch of colors. It doesn't make any sense."

"Not yet, but watch this." He clicked the mouse.

"What did you just do?"

"I punched in the numbers from your tracking device. They're a code. Mine was half of it, yours is the other half. And this is what happened."

"Is this the whole Goddamned state?"

"Yeah. And you see that?" He pointed to a purple center in northern Louisiana, the oldest permanent settlement in the Louisiana Purchase.

"Yeah."

"That's where it all started. That's where we have to go."

Her stomach did a little flip-flop at the thought. "We have to go back there?"

"Yeah, I'm afraid we do."

"I'm not going." She stood, turning her back to the computer. This just didn't make any sense. How could he just come along and break some kind of weirdo code she didn't even know existed? How could he just look inside her and see the answers to everything?

"I'll go then. Somebody did this to us. Jules may be protecting whoever it is, but he is not the core of this organization. Somebody brought me back to life, which means that somebody killed me once upon a time. I want to know who. And I want to know why they chose you to be their guinea pig."

"I don't need to know." She turned to face him and then wished she hadn't. There was no way she could lie to him.

"Yes, you do. Don't you want to know what they did to you? Don't you want to know why you were so pissed at me last night you wanted to kill me? Don't you care what they've turned you into?" He stood.

"They haven't turned me into anything," she snapped, feeling the rage build up inside her again.

"Fine. Here, take your sword then." He tossed the sword at her, and she caught it with her right hand. "Take it and tell me what you want to do."

Blood. The thought of demon blood seeped into her mind. The blood lust was back, so strong she could almost taste it in the air. The vein in Logan's neck throbbed, calling out to her, beckoning for her to slice into it and spill his blood. She licked her lips as her heart hammered in her chest. One little slice. That's all it would take.

"No," she yelled, tossing the sword to the floor.

"It's so strong, you have to. It's like a drug. It is a drug. It's what they put into you at the cemetery last night. They want you to kill me. You have to kill me because it's a test. It's all right here. Can't you see?"

He turned back to the computer and switched screens. "Here's the whole damned thing, Scarlett. And somebody is in charge, pulling your strings, driving you to kill. These demons... these are a distraction. They're a way to build up the lust. They're

a way to make your need to kill so strong that you can't resist it. I'm just the icing on the cake. Kill me and live forever."

It was all there. Every single bit of it. Whatever had been encoded on their tracking devices was much more than a means to find them. It was the whole fucking plan. His and hers matching doomsday devices. Fucking shit.

"What the hell do you know about this? Do you think this was an accident? Do you think they just magically put their whole Goddamned plan on these little microchips?" She glanced at the sword and then fisted her hands until she felt tiny half moons in her palms. He was right, the desire to kill was strong.

"No. It's not an accident. It's part of some bigger scheme. But I know we have to go back to Natchitoches to find out what's going on."

"What if I don't want to know?"

"How's this?" He clicked on another screen. "You see this? This is what was left in that syringe last night."

"What is it?"

"Hell if I know. I'm not sure how it works, but I know what it's made of. The formula's right here. See?"

"This is all one big lie, Logan. Nobody would do this. Nobody would put an entire fucking plan on a homing device. It's like giving a pigeon the Goddamn keys to the city."

"I know you don't believe me."

"You're right. I don't."

"Then just trust me. We have to go back home." He rolled his chair so that he sat in front of her, then he reached out and took her hand into his. "I wouldn't have asked you to cut yourself open if I didn't think this was something really big."

She had no choice but to trust him. Even if he was lying to her, even if he was simply wrong, there was more going on than Jules would ever have allowed her to know. And it only made sense that it would have started in Natchitoches.

Hell, that place had so many fucking haunted houses, it was like the New Orleans of North Louisiana. And slap in the middle of all of it was that fucking purple blip unlike anything else they had ever seen that looked to be about a half an acre in size.

"I'll go with you, then. When do you want to leave?"

"As soon as we can. I have cash. But first, I think we should pay Jules a visit."

"If I visit Jules, I'll kill him." She eyed the sword again.

"I know." His fingers trailed lightly against her skin.

"I don't know what to do." She sank to her knees in front of him.

"I know." His fingers went into her hair, rubbing the base of her neck like her mother used to do when she was a child.

Home. Could they go home? Her mama used to say you could never go home again. She let out a deep breath. "Have you got a bed in this place?"

"Yeah. Upstairs."

"Good. Take me there."

He stood and pulled her into his arms. "Should I carry you or do you want to walk?"

"I'll walk. You haven't knocked me off my feet yet." She started up the stairs with him behind her.

"I'd hold onto that thought if I were you."

* * *

"Do you know how long I've wanted to touch you?" The peacock feather in Logan's hand ran along her nipples, teasing them into two hardened buds.

"How long?"

"It seems like an eternity."

They lay on his bed tonight, touching each other as if this might be the last time for a long time. He'd asked her not to move, and she was doing her damndest to comply. With each feather stroke, it became more and more difficult to let him have time to play.

"I've wanted you for as long as I can remember." He ran the feather along her side, causing goose bumps to form in its wake. Her breath caught in her throat as he tickled her. He stopped just below her navel, teasing at the possibility of moving lower to torment her more sensitive flesh.

"I've wanted you, too, Logan."

"For as long as you've known me, right?" His voice sounded unusually dry.

"Yes. For that long."

"Then I'll give you what you want, Scarlett. I'll give you the man you've always wanted."

The feather trailed lower, brushing against her clit, which was already swollen with arousal. She spread her legs even further, allowing him greater access, but he continued to move the feather across her bud. Staying still was going to be very difficult if he kept doing that.

"Do you like this?"

"Mmmm." She couldn't manage a more precise response. Yes, she liked it, but there was more to this than what it was doing to her body. Somehow, her heart had gotten mixed up in all this. She'd never intended to fall for him. Again.

"How about this?"

He ran the feather along her labia, stopping at her opening, which was already wet and ready for him. Her inner walls clenched at the thought of having him inside her. His cock was so smooth and felt so incredible when it slid inside her. Having him there was like heaven, and she didn't know how much longer she could wait to have him give her what she needed. "Logan, I want you."

"I want you, too, but not yet. I want to taste you, to tease you, to bring you to the edge first. Are you ready to come for me?"

His words were an aphrodisiac to her system, sending a shiver of delight up her back as he leaned forward to breathe them against her neck. The rest of the world seemed to melt away when she was in his arms. There were no demons, there was no supreme controller to whom she answered, and there was no such thing as life and

death. It didn't matter that she couldn't have a future with him. Nothing mattered except the sensations moving through her body, pooling between her legs and driving her closer to the edge.

"I can't stay still."

"Then don't. Come show me what you want."

She pulled his mouth down on hers as he rose above her and positioned his cock at her opening. He only teased as his tongue darted into her mouth. She could feel her wetness sliding around him, coating the tip of his cock, bringing them both pleasure with the slippery torment.

Moaning into his mouth, she arched her hips, attempting to pull him inside by sheer force of will. His back stiffened in response, holding his cock just out of her reach. Against her better judgment, she was growing closer to him. And right now, she was determined to win this battle of wills.

Pressing her hand into his backside, she arched her back and thrust her hips all in one motion, catching him off guard. He slid into her as her pussy opened for him, welcoming him into her body.

"Now, why did you do that? I told you to be patient," he laughed.

"There is a difference between patient and masochistic."

"Oh? I didn't know." He thrust himself into her even further.

Her fingers wrapped around his headboard, bracing herself as he took his time, first entering her completely and quickly then pulling out slowly only to teasingly enter her. She spread her legs wider, giving him more access, allowing him to move even further into her and press against her cervix.

"Logan..."

"Mmmm?"

"Oh, God, this is so good."

"You are so good," he murmured against her ear as he leaned in to grab it between his teeth and give a slight pull.

Her fingers made their way down to her clit, which was covered with her own juices. His cock grazed against them as she began to rub tiny circles into her nub. Sliding her fingers lower, she caressed his scrotum and then moved back to her clit, all the while coating them with her cream. Her lips were swollen, her clit large and all of her blood had collected in her pussy, causing every sensation to be more intense than the last one.

Her breasts moved against his chest, rocking back and forth with each thrust, reminding her of how wonderful it felt to be free if only for a moment. As if he could read her mind, his hands moved up to caress her breasts, first covering one and then the other. Dipping down, he took her right nipple into his mouth, biting gently as he pinched her left nipple. She arched against him, pulling him in as far as she could, squeezing her inner muscles to keep him where she wanted him.

“Don’t move,” she warned.

He smiled down at her before covering her breast with his mouth once more and biting her with a little more intensity. She lost control. Her hand stopped moving on her clit and her muscles weakened beneath the orgasm that ripped through her body. The whole world seemed to stand still as she lay there, unable to do anything save for shake and milk his cock.

The low growl coming from his chest was all the proof she needed that he was coming, too. Then she felt his seed shoot against her cervix, hot, wet, filling her with his own need.

It took a few seconds for the room to come back into view. She couldn’t be sure if she’d spoken the dreaded words or not, but somewhere in the middle of it all, she could have sworn she’d told him she loved him.

As they lay wrapped in one another’s arms, she decided it must have been a dream because he hadn’t replied. Sometime later, she fell asleep in his arms, completely at peace with her decision to open herself up to him. And like it or not, she knew she was in love with Logan.

* * *

"Are you ready?"

"Not really." She shifted in his arms as the sun rose.

He squeezed her shoulder and pulled her against him. "I'll be with you."

"I know. I just really thought I could avoid going back."

"There's no way to avoid the past."

His words hung in the air as they made a silent vow to one another. They were going home. Hell's Half Acre, dead in the middle of Natchitoches. Those who lived there saw a beautiful historic town, but Scarlett and Logan had seen its dark side, and she dreaded having to go back.

Natchitoches housed more secrets than she cared to unearth. But Logan was right. In order to defeat whatever was controlling Jules -- whatever had made her what she was -- she had to go back and face everything she thought she'd left behind.

To be continued...

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